DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 099 CS 007 621

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TITLE The Effect of Bibliotherapy on Personal and Social Development of Second Graders.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 22p.; M.A. Thesis, Kean College of New Jersey.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Dissertations/Theses - Master Theses (042)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bibliotherapy; Child Development; Grade 2; *Personality Development; Primary Education; Reading Instruction; Reading Materials; *Reading Research; *Social Development

ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of bibliotherapy on the personal and social development of second grade students in a self-contained classroom. Students were pretested with the California Test of Personality (CTP), primary series, then were read to from books chosen on the basis of weaknesses exhibited by the children on the test. Books were read to the children each day for 12 weeks, and each reading session was followed by a group discussion. The CTP was administered as a posttest in the 13th week. Results indicated that the bibliotherapy had significant, positive effects on the social and personal development of the subjects. (A list of books used in the bibliotherapy sessions is appended.) (FL)

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ED243099

THE EFFECT OF BIBLIOTHERAPY ON PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND GRADERS

by
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master of Arts degree in Education at
Kean College of New Jersey
April 1984

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of bibliotherapy on personal and social development of second graders in a self-contained classroom. The procedure consisted of the students being pre- and post-tested with the California Test of Personality, primary series. Prescribed books were read to the students followed by a group discussion. The books were chosen on the basis of weaknesses exhibited from the pre-test. Books were read each day for twelve weeks. On the thirteenth week a post-test using the identical test was administered to determine if there was any improvement in personal or social adjustment. The results indicated significant statistical gain.

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TABLE

I. MEAN, SD's, t-TEST RESULTS OF THE CALIFORNIA TEST OF PERSONALITY 4

The influence of the school goes well beyond imparting intellectual skills. It provides the child's first opportunity for meaningful and prolonged interaction with adults and peers and a testing ground for self-expectations. Along with family and other socializing influences, it is centrally involved in the development of pro-social behaviors.

There are no problems common to all children during their development into adults. Such problems as being left out of a game or not liking something about one's appearance are situations shared by most children. Teachers can use the power of books to help their students cope with difficult situations.

Bibliotherapy can be thought of as "storybook guidance." It is a means for a child to identify with a character in a story who has similar problems to help the child understand himself (Schultheis 1972).

Research has continued to determine whether personal and social adjustment can be developed through the use of bibliotherapy. An experiment in the use of literature for guidance purposes in the classroom was reported by Elkins (1949). Information on the children was obtained from sociometric tests, individual interviews, compositions by the children on wishes and worries, diaries kept for two days, and sociodrama. Two main areas of problems emerged: those related to family and those related to peer relationships. Books were

chosen in both areas, and the reading was followed by class and panel discussions. The teacher was able to judge differences in reactions from written work and discussion. She found greater understanding in approaching a problem, deeper understanding of others' feelings, greater readiness to accept differences in others, and the ability to bring greater resources to the consideration of a problem.

Webster (1961) was able to reduce fear of the dark in first grade children by reading stories showing the positive attributes of the thing they feared.

Another study by Artforth (1980) examined the effect of group bibliotherapy on the anxieties of children in grades one, two, and three.

Berg-Cross and Berg-Cross (1978) concluded in their study that merely listening to a story can result in some significant attitude changes in young children.

Hypothesis

A study was therefore conducted to determine if bibliotherapy would promote personal and social development of second grade children. It was hypothesized that no significant improvement in the second graders' personal and social adjustment would be promoted through the use of bibliotherapy.

Definitions, Assumptions, Limitations

It is important to define the following terms so that misinterpretation does not result:

1. Bibliotherapy - assignment of books to be read on various subjects to help a child or a parent understand a problem to help him see the problem in a different way. The use of reading in a different way.

2. Personality - the manner and effectiveness with which the whole individual meets his personal and social problems.

3. Self-contained classroom - a classroom in the form of school organization in which classes are composed of groups of children which remain in one location, with one teacher (or team of teachers) for all or nearly all instructional activities, to be distinguished from a departmentalized classroom.

The study involved sixteen second grade children who were in a self-contained classroom. All the children were from middle class socio-economic background and attended school in a suburban setting. The California Test of Personality was utilized to determine the personal and social development of each student. Since the study was limited to twelve weeks, results might have been limited.

PROCEDURES

The entire class of sixteen second grade students were pre-tested in October using the California Test of Personality, primary series.

Bibliotherapeutic books were read to the students, followed by a group discussion (see Appendix A). Books were read four times a week for twelve weeks. On the thirteenth week a post-test using the identical instrument was administered to determine if there was any improvement in personal or social adjustment.

RESULTS

Table I illustrates the findings from the pre- and post-tests that were administered.

Table I

Mean, SD's, t-test results of the California Test of Personality

	Mean	SD	t
Subtest 1			
Personal Adjustment			
Pre-test	35.25	4.37	7.25
Post-test	37.56	3.78	
Subtest 2			
Social Adjustment			
Pre-test	35.63	3.81	9.90
Post-test	39.13	3.56	

*significant below the .01 level

There was a 2.31 point difference between the pre- and the post-mean on the Personal Adjustment Subtest and a 3.50 point difference between the pre- and post-test mean on the Social Adjustment Subtest indicating that a difference in the results had been produced by

bibliotherapy. All scores changed in a positive direction. The resultant t of 7.25 and 9.90 indicates there was significant change made on both subtests which could not have resulted by chance.

Conclusions and Implications

While the use of bibliotherapy has been the subject of controversy, it can be stated that, as a result of this study, evidence exists to suggest that a definite improvement can be achieved by using bibliotherapy. The means in the pre- and post-tests of this experiment indicated a significant change.

The hypothesis that there would be no significant improvement in second graders' personal and social adjustment as a result of bibliotherapy treatment was rejected.

One implication of the positive growth noted in this study is that bibliotherapy over a longer period of time may considerably affect a child's personality development.

The major focus of research on bibliotherapy has been the adolescent or adult. Few investigations have been conducted on the elementary level, and those that have been used non-validated questionnaires, observations, or interviews.

For future research it is suggested that similar experimentation be carried out with children of all ages over longer periods of time employing standardized measuring instruments.

THE EFFECT OF BIBLIOTHERAPY

ON PERSONAL & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

OF SECOND GRADERS

RELATED LITERATURE

The power of literature to deepen understandings and appreciations of the self and of others, and its potential for positive acculturation, has several dimensions. Bibliotherapy can be therapeutic and can heighten insights into problems, and provide solutions to them. Bibliotherapy can also be nurturant in developing meanings before conflict arises with self, another, society, or nature. It can inspire values, attitudes, and knowledge which lead to positive changes in behavior.

Bibliotherapy has been used for therapeutic purposes since the early period of manuscripts and scrolls (Moore, 1944). The method is as old as the prophets who exhorted their audiences to read the law to gain direction for daily living. The goal was the same: literature being used as "open sesame" to personal organization (Emeruwa, 1958).

The idea of positive acculturation through literature is not new. Aristotle wrote of the healing value of emotions aroused by reading. The library at Thebes, Greece, is inscribed "The Healing Place of the Soul". However, the first actual book describing the power of literature was not published until 1840, by an American, John Galt, M.D. Since that time many librarians and teachers, as well as physicians and psychologists, have drawn on literature "to promote the ability to find meaning in life... to endow life in general with more meaning..." (Bettelheim, 1977).

Literature provides a means for approaching the complexities and realities of life. It deepens experience and provides a human connection to issues of the times and to other beings (Sadker, 1977).

Vicarious participation in the lives of literary characters, especially when perceived as models, stimulates psychological processes which may lead to emotional and cathartic insights and more effective and humane coping behaviors. Conflicts may be resolved, values clarified, understandings developed, by analyzing the similar conflicts and resolutions of literary characters. Analyzing literature provides experience with the problem-solving process through identification. When confronted with a similar conflict situation, the reader then applies the insights gained, from the literature (Cianciolo, 1965).

In order for bibliotherapy to serve as a therapeutic medium, it usually involves interrelated aspects: involvement, identification, catharsis, and insight. Involvement is an interest or sense of being "caught up in" and concerned with the tale or message being delivered. Identification is a real or imagined affiliation of the reader, or someone he knows, with a character in the story. Catharsis is the release of emotional energy through vicariously experiencing the characters emotions. Insight is the awareness and clarification of the reader's own motivations, needs, and feelings (Nickerson 1975).

Other researchers are in agreement that through the interaction between the reader and selected materials, a child can obtain greater insight into himself and other. They also concluded that bibliotherapy is a technique available to classroom teachers. (Witty 1968, Loran, 1968, Newell, 1957, Lindahl and Koch, 1952). Since this technique is available to classroom teachers, Salup and Szako feel that there are few bibliotherapy courses taught in colleges in the United States. Teachers at all grade levels deal with the needs and problems of their

students. Teachers with a background in bibliotherapy could be instrumental in assisting their students to deal with problems (Salup and Szako 1978).

A successful study by Elkins revealed the effectiveness of using literature for guidance purposes (Elkins 1949). Herminghaus found that bibliotherapy promoted desirable attitudes and produced a higher degree of personal and social adjustment in a group of eighth graders. Shrodes reported an immediate increase in self-awareness and acceptance and a greater capacity to maintain fulfilling relationships (Herminghaus 1954, Shrodes 1955).

Martin reported an experiment by Pirie with a group of first graders. After reading a number of selections to the children, she used a tape recorder to determine the impact the books had upon children. The children identified with the characters which helped them to solve their problems. They also seemed to identify acceptable social behavior. A similar study was conducted by Livengood. She used a group of sixth graders, finding the same results (Martin 1955, Livengood 1961).

Webster's study with first graders indicated that reading stories to children resulted in the reduction of their initial fears (Webster 1961).

Witty feels that bibliotherapy used as a preventive measure or for guidance purposes is gaining acceptance in satisfying the needs of individual slow learners and gifted students (Witty 1964).

A study by Cutforth examined the effect of group bibliotherapy on the anxieties of children in grades one, two and three. In comparing the pre-and post-test scores, he found that bibliotherapeutic treatment lessened the anxiety in boys in grades one, two and three. The treatment also lessened anxiety in girls in grades one and two. Grade three females showed no significant improvement as measured by the Sarason's General Anxiety Scale for Children (Cutforth 1980).

In Fehl's study, high school students were asked to report changes in their concepts, attitudes, and behaviors that they concluded were a result of reading. A content analysis of the responses to the questionnaire showed areas in which students were influenced: self-image, philosophy of life, cultural groups, social problems, and human sensitivity (Fehl, 1968).

Another study reported related findings. Brooks concluded that developmental values depicted in books serve as catalysts for change in readers' behaviors, thinking, and feelings, even though those changes are not dramatic (Brooks, 1950).

Berg-Cross and Berg-Cross concluded in their study that merely listening to a story can result in some significant attitude changes in young children. They compared responses to questions before and after listening to four well-known children's books. The four and six year olds changed more than one-half of their initial answers as a result of the listening activity (Berg-Cross 1978).

In his study, however, Loban found that stories read aloud to adolescents must necessarily be followed by discussion techniques if the students were to achieve the insights in social sensitivity (Loban, 1953).

Aaron and Muench concluded that systematic instruction in reading and analyzing literature helped to develop an intellectual and emotional understanding of story characters' state of mind and thus to enhance self-concept and values. They found that a taxonomic approach which moves from cognitive to affective dimensions increases adolescents' competence at making value judgements, relating literary characters to their own self-concepts, and identifying adults who show more socially acceptable forms of behavior (Aaron and Muench, 1975).

Presenting another side of the issue, Russell and Shrodes argue that it is uncertain that a specific literary work will influence any particular reader, or that the influence will occur in the desired direction. Tensions and anxieties may block or destroy constructive ideas. A character who is a strong reminder of a negatively esteemed self may be rejected or disliked. Valid identification may be missed altogether because of a self-concept that is too vague. A character who is dissimilar socially and economically may be ignored even though his conflicts are similar to the reader's (Russell and Shrodes, 1950).

In addition, Zaccaria and Moses caution that readers may tend to rationalize or intellectualize situations, to raise defenses. There may be the tendency to assume that merely reading a work of literature will solve problems. Insight gained through reading may not be worked out because the child lacks the

coping behavior needed for change. Too, it is possible that fears and anxieties may be reinforced by reading about conflict (Zaccaria and Moses 1968).

Although the instructor must give careful consideration to these cautions, it is possible to lead the reader to deeper insights, understandings, and appreciations of each of the problems mentioned above. In coming to grips with the realities of day-to-day living, schools are having to formulate clear and concrete social objectives. Because bibliotheraphy is one of the few systematic possibilities for dealing with attitudinal change, it should be given more attention. It is easily accessible to all teachers and school systems (Livengood, 1964).

Although the degree to which readers are affected by literature has not been fully measured, the related research confirm that they are influenced. No one has attacked the use of bibliotherapy on theoretical or ethical grounds either. It appears that the studies support the use of bibliotherapy to promote personal and social development in children. There is need for more study to determine the specific effects of reading under varying conditions. Further research is needed to validate earlier, less formal research. The entire field of children's literature in the social studies as an area for research is newly recognized. Therefore, it is an area where considerable research has yet to be done.

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